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ABSTRACT

The concepts and roles of motivation and attitude in relation to second language learning are examined. Motivation can be characterized as primary or derivative, and intrinsic or extrinsic. Attitude is a motivational factor generated by context. Motivation and attitude play an important role in all situations which are not natural, such as school language instruction. Studies of situations involving two languages in the same area or school have been conducted. Those studies are described which investigated four types of situations: (1) a dialect versus the national language (Italian); (2) a minority language versus the national language; (3) a dialect, the national language, and a foreign language; and (4) Italian as a foreign language in an alien community. The empirical data indicate a social basis of attitude in second language learning and the importance of psychoeducational strategies aimed at developing appropriate attitudes toward the language to be studied. The development of positive attitudes toward the target language and culture is the first step toward bilingualism. (RW)

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ATTITUDE: A CRUCIAL DIFFERENTIAL VARIABLE IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

0. The role of attitude and motivation in L2 learning

The central role of motivation as a triggering factor in all learning processes has been frequently and adequately evidenced by psychological theory and research. Language learning, as a vital developmental process in human beings, rests very largely on the influence of cognitive and dynamic factors. Motivational factors have been studied as underlying achievement in learning one or more languages. Attitude appears to be strictly tied up with motivational dynamics, and to work most powerfully especially in acquiring mastery in a second language. It tends to influence most decisively the assimilation, in a profound personological and behavioral sense, of both language patterns and cultural modalities.

A short premise is in order on the operational concepts of motivation and attitude vis-à-vis second language learning.

0.1 Motivation with respect to learning in general and language learning in particular is to be viewed under a variety of aspects:

(a) Motivation appears to be a co-essential and equipowerful factor in comparison with linguistic aptitude and personality traits. Success in language learning is found to depend to a fairly equal degree on both linguistic aptitude and on motivation, or interest, attitude, value-perception; the latter usually connected with personality traits, like extroversion/intraversion. Attitude seems to be central in motivational dynamics.

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(b) Motivation, and more particularly attitude, rises from relational interaction between organism and environment, or, more precisely, in the human being, between the Self and the World. According to Titone's (1975) 'mathetic cycle', proposed as a general model of learning, motivation is a dynamogenetic process consisting of the following essential steps: 1. Need perception 2. Feeling of interest 3. Positive attitude 4. Intention as approaching mechanism of a conscious nature 5. Decision of voluntary choice. The initial step—need perception—stems from a comparison between the state of the organism and the environmental supplies capable of filling organic and psychological demands. Interest in turn arises out of the perception of an object appropriate to the organism's need. Attitude follows as a specifically human response to the environment as carrier of values. It develops as a specific cognitive-affective set. In our case linguistic attitude would be a cognitive-affective orientation towards one particular language and culture. And it can work . . as a control mechanism (feedback) as well as a propelling force pushing towards new worthy goals (feedforward).

(c) Motivation can be of an inchoative character (primary motivation) when it initiates behavior or learning, or of an emergent or derivational nature (secondary motivation) when it arises from action or the learning process itself. Attitude, consequently, can be modified in the course of learning whatever its nature may be at the origin of the same process. Of course, inchoative motivation, to be effective, must have a lasting or durable influence on learning: it must be continuous with learning, even though it may be virtually present only.

(d) Motivation can be intrinsic (endogenous) when it is functional to the growth of the organism and arises from inborn or internalized needs and interests (see the notion of interest according to the Functional School of psychology, J. Dewey and E. Claparède); or it can be extrinsic (exogenous) when it is induced from outside conditions like cultural values, social pressures, disciplinary measures or laws and regulations, etc. Intra-group relations, as illustrated e.g. by K. Lewin, may be at the root of certain types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Attitude typically belongs in the sphere of intrinsic motivation since it is generated from within the psychological organism.

0.2 Other differences in the kind of motivation are of a contextual (social-cultural) origin. This applies particularly to language learning. Attitude is a context-generated motivational factor, although its structure in itself is of an endogenous nature: in other words, it is the result of internalization as a process directed to assimilate values offered by society and history. In the specific case of language learning it is possible to hypothesize two classes of contextually different attitudes:

(a) linguistic attitude toward a second language/culture as co-existent in a given bilingual area: this happens in bilingual regions or communities even though not all the individuals are in themselves bilingual (societal bilingualism);

(b) linguistic attitude toward school-context learning of a second/foreign language: the second language may not be present in the community but it is contacted at school as a curriculum subject. The present discussion aims at focusing on this second type of context only.

0.3 Motivation and attitude in L2 learning have been examined in a psycholinguistic perspective (see Lambert, 1972; CMLR, 1976; Spoelders, 1978; Oller, 1981). A very brief summary may be recalled here.

0.3.1 Research conducted by W.E. Lambert, H. Gardner, and others in Canada, have evidenced the character of equal strength in effective language learning of two sets of factors: attitude factors (as a subjective disposition toward learning objects) and aptitude factors (or individual capacity for learning brought to a sufficient degree of 'readiness'). Moreover, particular importance must be assigned to what Lambert has called "integrative motivation" which implies the tendency or desire to become like a valued member of the foreign community by mastering its language. As said above, attitude is strictly tied up with motivation inasmuch as it triggers interest, intention, and decision to operate toward learning. Motivation is a sine qua non factor in all human learning, and therefore, above all in language learning, especially as a conscious process of acquisition distinct from spontaneous language development in the child.

0.3.2 Motivation and attitude hold an extremely important role in all situations which are not natural but culturally or socially induced like school education. Learning in that case requires more conscious effort and continuity which need the support of interest and attitude. Secondly, motivation and attitude are crucial in the case of language education of the children of migrant workers. Studies conducted on samples of immigrants have emphasized the necessity of adequate intrinsic motivation for the maintenance of L1 with immigrant children, while on the other side positive attitude is generally strongly in favor of L2, or the language of the host country. (See Tedesco, 1980;

Oesch-Serra et al.,1981).

1. Attitudes regarding interlinguistic situations of diglossia and/or bilingualism

Case studies of psycho-socio-linguistic situations concerning the co-existence or conflict of two codes in the same area or in the school have been conducted by R. Titone's team (Chair: Applied Psycholinguistics, University of Rome) taking account of four possible situations which arise from the convergence of (A) a dialect vs. the national language, (B) a minority language vs. the national language, (C) a dialect vs. the national language vs. a foreign language, and (D) Italian as a foreign language in an alien community.

(A) Dialect vs. National Language (Italian):

Since 1974 over twenty investigations have been conducted aiming at checking on not only communication difficulties and handicaps in school interaction due to conflicts between use of dialect and instruction in the national language (Italian) but also particular attitudes vis-à-vis the local dialect on one side and the national standard language on the other of diglossic individuals whether during childhood or adulthood. Typical results are shown in two projects developed in two regions of Central and Southern Italy.

Tudini (1978) has examined language behavioral patterns dependent on cultural transformation in a mountain village of Abruzzo (Pescasseroli). The objective was not only determining the extent of use of both the local dialect and the national language but especially the users' attitudes with regard to both codes. Testing instruments

were: a simplified questionnaire administered to four groups of adult workers; an enlarged questionnaire given to secondary school students, teachers, and retired adults; the semantic differential applied to this second group; observations and interviews with elementary school pupils; and a diachronic linguistic examination of the evolution of the local dialect.

Results. To 90.90% of the Ss the dialect preserves a clear connotation of familiarity and intimacy; but the national language is rated very highly and preferred unreservedly from the point of view of social prestige and for wider contacts. The dialect is gradually being segregated into a cultural ghetto consisting mainly of very old people or semi-illiterates.

Iuzzino (1979-1980), on the other hand, specifically explored school contexts. She examined 80 elementary school children, male and female, in 3rd and 5th grades, their teachers, and their parents. Her aim was to explore: the socio-affective perception those speakers have of the two linguistic codes; dialect interferences with regard to the standard language; the relationship between choice of code and expressive efficacy in communicating information contents; the relationship between use of dialect and learning achievement in school subjects.

Results. A very high percentage (above 50%) both of the children and their parents, but especially of their teachers, manifest most clearly an over-rating attitude with regard to the prestige of the national standard language in comparison with the dialect, even though the Ss' use of the standard language is deficient or not very frequent. This favorable attitude toward the standard language is only one factor fostering learning. Occasional failure is due to pedagogical inefficiency or the influence of lower-class home environment.

(B) Minority Language vs. National Language (Italian):

Chiarelli (1978) wanted to explore the attitudes of members of a bilingual Italian-Albanian community in a Southern Italian village (San Nicola dell'Alto) towards respectively Albanian and Italian. Instruments used were two structured questionnaires applied orally by means of individual interviews with two samples of Ss: adult workers (till the age of 70) and students and teachers.

Results. Standard Italian is seen as a necessary schooling tool and essential component of literacy; and furthermore as a bridge towards wider social contacts. Albanian is connoted by a strong affective orientation of traditional and cultural belongingness. Out of 101 adults interviewed 45% think that the Italian language is necessary for school success, whereas 42% deny it. It is indifferent, from the standpoint of social prestige, whether a person speaks one or the other language (according to 68%). Answers are not substantially different with the subgroups (10 male students, 10 female students, and 10 elementary school teachers). These groups are convinced that young children must be initiated as effectively as possible to a good command of the standard Italian language (70% of the male students, 90% of the female students, and 80% of the teachers.) Among adults and old people of the village the Albanian language is dominant; and they believe firmly that Albanian must be preserved at all as a cultural heritage (38%) or linguistic heritage (33%). But also young people are convinced (100%) about the utility, vitality, and necessity of maintenance of Albanian. However their undoubted swinging between two languages and cultures has thrown them into a generalized identity crisis and a widespread state of anomie.

(C) Dialect vs. National Language vs. Foreign Language:

Two studies can be cited here. The first conducted by one of my students, Tedesco (1980), was carried out in the Swiss Canton of Zurich on the educational achievement and cultural-linguistic attitudes of 239 Italian students (125 from 5th and 6th grades, 114 from [redacted] middle schools.) They were children of Italian immigrants working in Switzerland. Interviews reveal a sad situation with regard to school failure. As far as cultural identity and linguistic attitudes are concerned, anomie is a clear data. More than statistical data, which however are revealing with respect to individual differences of feeling and opinion, certain answers to crucial questions are reasons for worry. For example, the question, "Do you feel you are Italian or Swiss?", the answers are contradictory: "Very much Italian", "Italian 100 per cent!", but at the same time: "More Italian but also a little Swiss", "Italian, even though I have Swiss friends". Not infrequently do they show unambiguous signs of Swiss identity: they have no Italian friends, and they don't want to go back to Italy. Now the point is that these feelings and attitudes of uncertainty and anomie impoverish the social sources of motivation for the study of Italian, and make it difficult to start an effective process of learning of the original language, which actually is not used in the home since the village dialect is usually made use of in communicating with their parents.

A second study, by Oesch-Serra et al. (1981), confirms the above results. It was conducted by Swiss researchers in the Canton of Neuchâtel. It is of interest to find what emerges from exploring the younger generation's attitudes, since the younger people are totally integrated with the host culture and language. It should be made clear that the so-called native language (Italian) has become a second language and needs to be studied as a foreign language. Now

with regard to the attitude concerning the immigrants' native language and culture (both the dialect and the standard national language), two stages have been observed related to and dependent on the psycho-social development of the younger generation: the first stage is characterized by a neat refusal of the first (native) language felt as deviant from the life norms of the majority group (host community) to which the young individual wants absolutely to adhere; on a later stage young people, during or at the end of their teens, rediscover their native language and its cultural heritage all the way even as far as idealizing a mythical "fatherland". the goal of an old age retirement. This observation, made in Europe, can be repeated also in other countries like the USA and Canada.

Obviously, this ambivalence of attitudes impinges on learning, re-learning, or maintaining the original language, which has become or is becoming foreign to the young immigrant.

(D) Attitude and appreciation of certain traits of a foreign language:

Apothéloz and Bysaeth (1981) have launched a very interesting study of linguistic attitudes regarding some foreign languages being studied by Swiss students. By employing two types of questionnaire (a matching test and the semantic differential) they wanted to ascertain various traits of individual attitude vis-à-vis different languages: English, French, Spanish, Swiss-German, Italian, German. The evaluation of the traits of each language was to take place on the basis of thirteen adjectives classified into three categories: esthetic-affective, utilitarian, learning-comprehension. The esthetic-affective category seems to be rather prominent and influencing choice or learning effort. The results usually combine Italian and Spanish. In particular, these two languages are opposed to the others—and specifically to Swiss-German and

German, less to French and English--because of their position on the scale of esthetic values (the adjectives which received high grades are musical, warm, beautiful, coquettish, and less used the adjective sweet.) On the other side, Italian and Spanish differ as to the attributes related to "learning" and "understanding" inasmuch as Italian is as a whole considered to be simpler. They differ also from the point of view of "utility" although very slightly. (Spanish is considered to be more useful.) Moreover, Italian and Spanish receive middle-low grades as to their practical value and importance. Finally, attitude appears to have a different connotation according to sex: thus English, Italian, and Spanish aroused more positive responses among female students than among male ones, with regard to all attributes, while Swiss-German received very negative responses. Divergence between the responses of boys and girls concerns especially Italian and Spanish.

Such evaluative responses, no matter how shallow they may appear, should not be considered irrelevant: they too weigh very heavily, particularly in certain social contexts, on motivations concerning study or choice of a foreign/second language. What K. Bühler called the characteristic of "Appell" as part of the essential features of language as a spiritual product, works as a factor in the relationship between personality and language behavior. Theoretically, R. Titone's Holodynamic Model (1973, 1981) which emphasizes the role of the Self as individual/social pole interacting with the World, finds a confirmation from these empirical facts.

2. Socio-cultural genesis of attitudes in L2 learning

A brief remark by way of conclusion is in order at this point. Empirical data point to the socio-genetic character of attitude in second language learning and to the importance of psycho-educational strategies aiming at developing appropriate attitudes vis-à-vis the second/foreign language to be studied.

Positive or negative attitudes towards a language as object of study are not inborn: they derive from social factors, mediated by states of the interacting organism, which together condition dispositional sets of a cognitive-affective nature towards given cultures and their transmission systems. Hence the origin of preferences or bias, oftentimes transformed into cultural clichés. It is of utmost importance, where ethno-linguistic conflicts are to be settled or where effective learning of a second language is to be fostered, to supply conditions favoring the development of attitudes of acceptance of cultural patterns diverging from native ones. This can be obtained through special initiatives aiming at acquaintance and self-identification with the target culture. To this purpose it has been noted that efficient organization of international student exchange programs has brought in general good results relatively to the promotion of favorable linguistic attitudes. Cziko and Lambert (1976) report about a well controlled experiment carried out in Canada consisting in the mutual immersion of students from French-speaking and English-speaking schools into areas speaking the opposite language. Results have been optimal with regard to the changing of developing of positive linguistic-cultural attitudes in both groups. The consequence was a deeper absorption of the two languages on either side.

It can therefore be reconfirmed that developing sound attitudes is the first step towards the achievement of bilingualism.

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